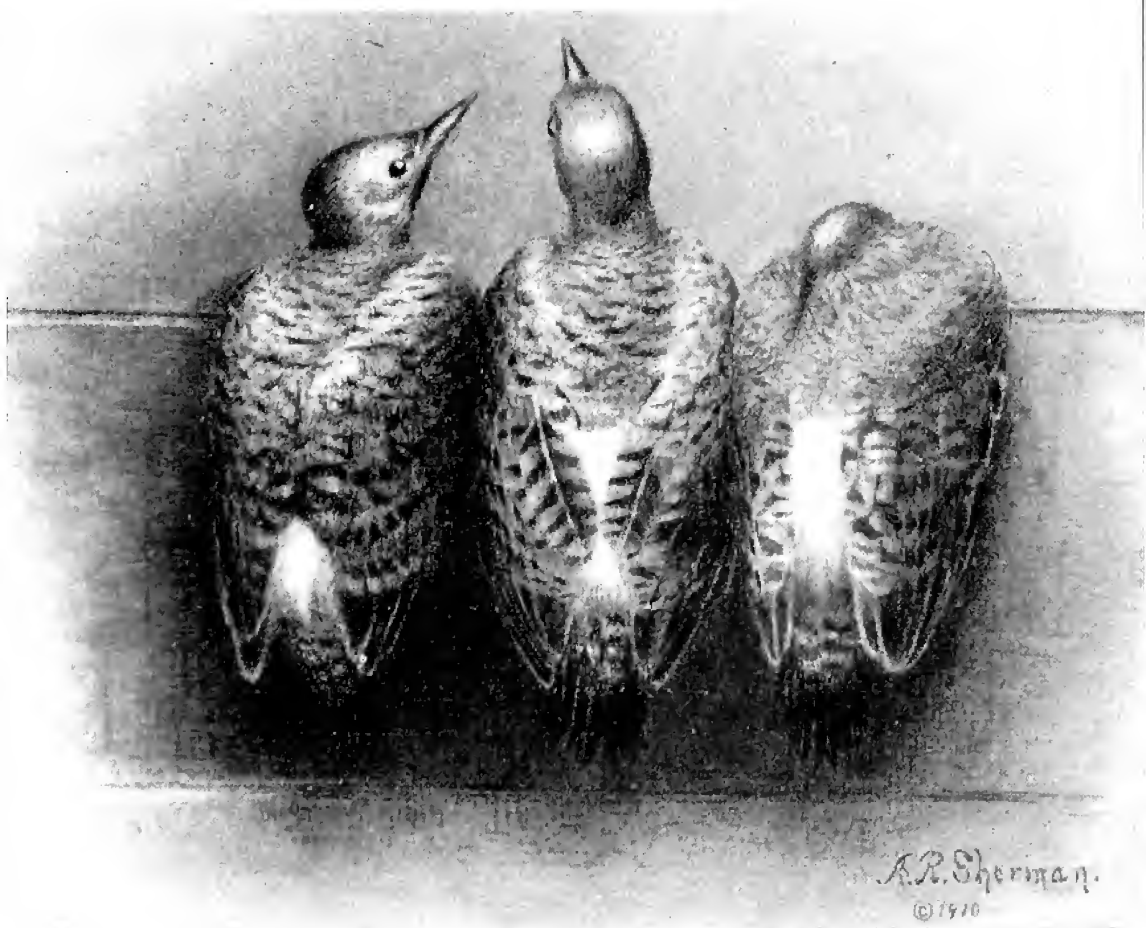


# BIRDS OF AN IOWA DOORYARD

By  
ALTHEA R. SHERMAN

Edited by Fred J. Pierce  
Foreword by Arthur J. Palas



CHARACTERISTIC POSTURES OF NESTLING FLICKERS  
WHILE AWAITING A MEAL

*From A Drawing By The Author*

# A NOTEWORTHY CONTRIBUTION

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In this handsome new book Miss Sherman's important nesting studies are offered to a rapidly growing army of serious bird students. Although a posthumous publication, the best portions of her work have been preserved and nothing has been spared to make the book a noteworthy contribution to the science of ornithology.

Althea R. Sherman was as unusual a personality as she was an outstanding ornithologist. She was born in Iowa in 1853, and was reared in the rugged pioneer environment which no doubt influenced her entire life. After receiving a Bachelor's Degree from Oberlin College, she taught for several years in the public schools, and, following post graduate work at Oberlin, she received her Master's Degree and spent several years in the study of art. For a time she was instructor in drawing at Carleton College and then was supervisor of drawing in the public schools at Tacoma, Washington. In 1895 she returned to her ancestral home at National, Iowa.

After her return to Iowa, Miss Sherman studied nesting birds with an intensity and devotion that won national acclaim for her in scientific circles. She came to be regarded as one of the leading authorities on the nestlife of various birds. The results of her studies were published in leading scientific journals, and she left a rich store of unpublished material.

Very fine selections from this wealth of material are presented in "Birds of An Iowa Dooryard." Fred J. Pierce, an authority on Iowa birds, and for more than twenty years editor of the state magazine, "Iowa Bird Life" is editor of the Sherman

# TO THE SCIENCE OF ORNITHOLOGY

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book, and has done an expert job in the selection of material. The book contains a unique and valuable collection of Miss Sherman's writings — all the important nesting studies, chosen from her unpublished work and from papers published in the "Auk" and "Wilson Bulletin".

Atty. Arthur J. Palas, long a friend of Miss Sherman, contributes an intimate biography to the book. His Foreword gives the reader a frankly clear picture of Althea Sherman and the surroundings in which she worked.

Among Miss Sherman's singular accomplishments was the building of a tower, 30 feet high and 9 feet square, for the sole purpose of attracting the Chimney Swift so that a systematic study of its nesting habits could be made — probably the only structure of its kind in existence. Peep-holes at several places in the chimney allowed the close observations which resulted in some of the most complete studies of nesting of this species ever made, over a long period of years.

Miss Sherman was a member of fifteen scientific societies. She was listed in "Who's Who" and "American Men of Science," and was honored by the American Ornithologists' Union by being elevated to an exclusive class of membership. The Sherman home in the ghost town of National (near McGregor), Iowa, was visited by men and women distinguished in many fields of the natural sciences while Miss Sherman was living. Near her home she made the famous studies of Iowa birds printed in "Birds of an Iowa Dooryard".

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ALL WHO ARE INTERESTED IN BIRDS

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# IOWA BIRD LIFE

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Publications of the Union: Mimeographed letters, 1923-1928; 'The Bulletin,' 1929-1930; 'Iowa Bird Life,' beginning 1931.

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EDITORIAL AND PUBLICATION OFFICE  
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LEAST TERN NEST SCENES

Incubating birds at the nest. In the lower left view both birds are seen at the nest. Photographs by Tom Kent.

## THE LEAST BITTERNS OF SWAN LAKE

By TOM KENT

IOWA CITY, IOWA

(With photographs by the author)

During the past summer I spent considerable time gathering data on Least Bitterns at Swan Lake, in Johnson County, Iowa. Swan Lake is a 44-acre marsh, oblong in shape and ranging in depth from a few inches to not more than 4 feet. In summer the marsh vegetation covers the lake so that very little open water can be seen. The marsh provides excellent nesting habitat for marsh birds such as the Coot, Florida Gallinule, Pied-billed Grebe, Prairie Marsh Wren, Redwings and the Least Bittern.

I became interested in the Least Bittern in the summer of 1949, when Dr. Vane located a nest and took excellent movies of it. That summer we suspected there were more than one pair nesting but did not take time to look for them.

On June 17, 1951, Dick Lorenz, Norwood Hazard and I put a canoe in Swan Lake in hope of finding a Bittern nest to photograph. As we pushed the canoe through the reeds we flushed one Least Bittern after another, and it was not long before we came to a partially constructed, platform-like nest, made by bending over bur-reed stalks and adding more stalks. Bur-reed is a marsh plant which is found in an area about 20 feet wide extending all the way around the lake where the water is a foot or two deep. Before the day was over we had found four more nests in the building stage and four nests containing eggs.

The next day we returned, this time to try to photograph the Least Bittern on the nest. Norwood set up a blind on one nest while Dick and I tried to photograph another from the canoe. We set up the camera near the nest, moved the canoe as far away as was possible with a 20-foot remote release, and waited. When lying down out of sight in the canoe, we couldn't tell when the bird returned to the nest. Twice we waited for more than a half hour, and when we rose up to see if the Bittern was on the nest, it flushed from near the nest. Finally Dick went ashore and climbed a tree so he could see the bird approaching. This time I lay in the bottom of the boat for more than an hour before the bird returned and I could get a picture. The second picture took only a half hour. By the fourth and fifth pictures it took only about five minutes for the bird to come back. From then on, after taking a picture, I got almost to the camera before the bird would rise up and flap over the reeds about 50 feet before dropping into them.

On later dates I photographed from a blind. On all these occasions the male bird seemed to be doing most of the incubating and caring for the young, but this is probably due to the fact that the females are much shyer and do not return to the nest as readily. Once when I was photographing I noticed that as I got out of the blind to re-set the camera, the male flushed from the nest and at the same time the female flew up from a spot near by. When I got back in the blind the male returned, and when the female got in the territory he started making peculiar sounds, opened his bill, and his neck muscles began vibrating. After a long while I saw the female working her way through the reeds toward the nest. She was very shy and would come almost to the nest and then back away again; this continued for almost two hours. I got tired waiting and finally snapped a picture when she was almost on the nest.

After June 17 I visited Swan Lake 21 times and found a total of 19 Least Bittern nests. On each trip I waded around the lake, checked all nests and looked for new ones, and took some pictures. All the nests were located in the belt of bur-reed (*Sparganium*) around the lake, but seven of them were



built mostly of bulrush (*Scirpus validus*), and one was built in a clump of cattail (*Typha latifolia*). All but two of the nests ranged between 2 and 7 inches above the water, and those two were more than a foot above the water. The construction of the nest varied considerably, but all of them were about the same size, about 8 inches across. In the early part of the season the nests were mostly out in the open, built of green vegetation bent over or carried in from near by. As the season progressed the vegetation grew up around the nest and the nest material itself turned brown. Some of the nests were made of fairly fine material and quite compact, while others were of coarser material and appeared to be rather flimsy.

The nests were not in colonies but distributed rather evenly around the lake. They were not hard to locate. I could tell when I was nearing a nest by the way the bur-reeds had been trampled down by the Bitterns as they went to and from it. During the first few visits to the lake many Bitterns were seen as they flushed ahead of me, and on one occasion I approached within 5 feet of a male. As the season went on the birds became increasingly hard to see. Sometimes I would cover the whole lake and see only two or three birds. When the observer approaches a nest, the bird apparently slips off unnoticed and walks rapidly away and then either flushes when the nest is reached or remains quietly in the reeds until the danger is past.

The number of eggs in the nests varied from two to five. Nine of the 19 nests contained five eggs, five had four eggs, four had three eggs, and one had two eggs; the total number of eggs counted was 79. Of these not more than 60 hatched. Three nests which were abandoned and one which was destroyed accounted for the others. The last one was likely rebuilt as another nest was found in the same vicinity shortly after. This was the only case where I found more than one nest built by one pair, as none of the others could have overlapped. Therefore, there must have been at least 18 pairs of Bitterns on the lake. I do not think polygamy would occur where the males share the nesting duties.

Of the possible 60 young that hatched, not more than 31 survived long enough to leave the nest. Three factors might be taken into consideration to explain this. First, the Least Bitterns are reported to be cannibalistic, and my observations tend to confirm this. Usually incubation begins as soon as the first egg is laid; therefore, nestlings are of different sizes, and often the first one is quite large before the last one is hatched. In one case



SWAN LAKE IN AUGUST





LEAST BITTERN NESTS

On the left is a typical nest. In the right photograph newly-hatched young nearly surround an unhatched egg.

the young had left the nest before the last egg hatched. At nearly every nest where I observed young and eggs in the nest together, when I returned later, almost invariably I would find the same number of young but fewer eggs. On two occasions I noticed young partially out of the eggs, but on the next day there was no evidence of them in the nest, so these may have been consumed. About 11 young could have disappeared by this practice. A second factor is predation. One nest was destroyed with five young in it, the cause of which I could not determine as the nest was completely gone. At another nest I saw a water snake crawl directly over the nest containing young but it did not disturb them. Perhaps it was escaping me. This was as near as I came to seeing a predator but doubtless there are some which prey on Bitterns. The possibility of disease may be a third factor. Toward the end of July and the first week in August there were only three nests left containing young. These seemed to be unhealthy. None of them matured as I found the remains in all three nests several days later.

In the past three years my first records of the season were in the latter half of June, but these may be too casual as this summer's experience proved that these birds are not easily found without thorough search right out in the swamp. In the present study the first young were recorded on July 2 and the last hatch on July 28. I had two fall records this year. The first was on September 1, when a Least Bittern flew into a light near the Iowa City Airport at nine in the evening, apparently migrating along the Iowa river nearby. On October 8, while I was standing in the school parking lot near the river, I saw a bird flying downriver, and as it got nearer I recognized it as a Least Bittern. Oddly, it headed directly toward the building but at the last moment swerved just in time, circled and lit behind a parked car.

#### THE CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS

will be taken as usual between December 20 and 30. Study the form of censuses published in previous March issues and follow details carefully. List the birds in the A. O. U. order, giving exact number seen, and include data on hours, weather and ground conditions. Send your list to the Editor of "Iowa Bird Life" not later than January 15. This is the closing date on our tabulation of censuses and lists received after that cannot be included.

## THE HAWK MOUNTAIN FLIGHT

By M. L. JONES

BOONE, IOWA

The song, "I Must Go Where the Wild Goose Goes," must have a certain appeal to all birders. It was with a somewhat similar spirit of adventure that the writer accepted an invitation to fly with the Christensens (of Spencer) to Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania. The flight out at about 4000 feet elevation was uneventful but a lesson in geography every grade youngster could utilize and enjoy.

Weather conditions for the entire trip were about 95% perfect. In fact, the one full day spent on the "Lookout" at Hawk Mountain was better for the observers than for a good hawk flight. Maurice Broun, who is curator at Hawk Mountain, was a wonderfully helpful host. He could identify the hawks at so great a distance as to make us skeptical at first. However, as the birds came nearer and he pointed out the various characteristics, he seemed always to get them right. A week on Hawk Mountain with him during good hawk flights would do more for our identification of hawks than ten years with the few hawks we find in Iowa.

Anyone who has not read "Hawks Aloft" by Maurice Broun should make a vow not to let another spring arrive without enjoying this fascinating adventure in conservation.

The Doctors Everett and Eunice Christensen had visited Hawk Mountain before and were thus quite well acquainted with Mr. Broun. It was our good fortune that he was persuaded to go with us on a flight extending on to Cape Cod. Mr. Broun had made his home on Cape Cod before taking over his duties on Hawk Mountain; thus we were taken to the best birding areas, where we added to our life list such birds as the Pine Warbler and Gannet, as well as to the writer's experiences via a dip in the ocean. We came near to being fog-bound on the cape but got out into a storm front which tossed us about somewhat, giving us a sample of what can happen to an otherwise rugged stomach.

We were very fortunate in finding New York City completely in the open with no fog or smoke obscuring our view as we flew at about 2000 feet above the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building. Some photographic evidence of the view was obtained. What a wonderful way to see New York City — looking DOWN on the tall buildings as well as the high prices.

After returning Mr. Broun to his sanctuary, we set our compass for Parkersburg, West Virginia, to visit good friends of the Christensens who live on what must be the original Mockingbird Hill. We can never forget the Meredith home and hospitality or their Mockingbirds which sang constantly. The Pileated Woodpecker on a nearby hill also challenged us to do a little hill-climbing where one finds the strangest assortment of tree associations ever seen. All on one small hill were these trees and shrubs: sumac, paw-paw, black locust, hickory, white oak, red oak, red maple, gumwood, sycamore, sassafras, bayberry, mulberry, elm, boxelder and jack-pine.

Our trip home was uneventful except that we were forced to fly as low as can safely be done because of the winds. Even at 2000 feet and less, very few birds can be detected on the ground. Meadowlarks were too small ever to be seen. Pigeons could often be observed. Once a Red-tailed hawk flew very low below us. Very low was also the way we flew into Boone, for the last 5 miles got us into rain and ground fog — the first rain we had encountered in our 11 days of living and flying with the birds. The weather did the Joneses one good deed by holding the Christensens over at the Ledges for the night.

## BIRDS AT MY STUDIO WINDOW

By EARNEST W. STEFFEN

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

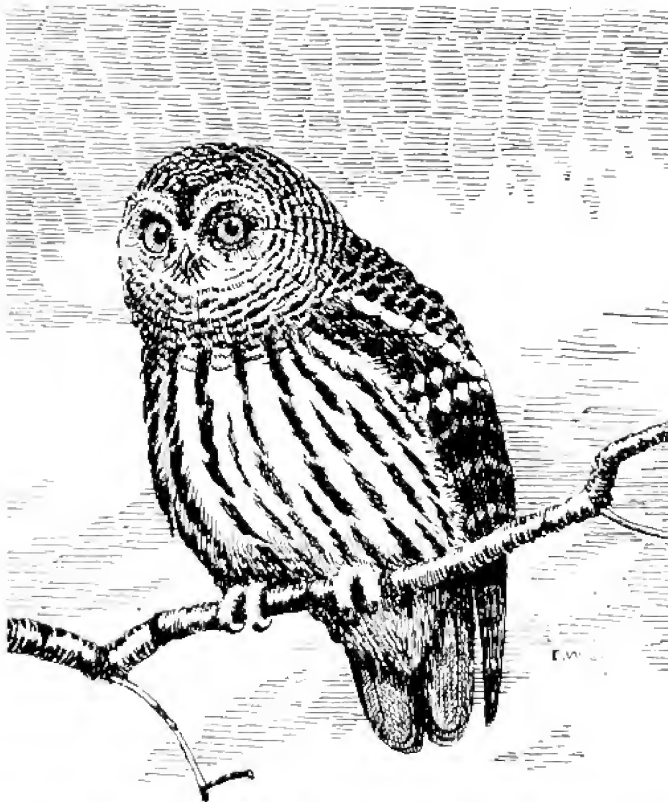
(With a drawing by the author)

BARRED OWL — *Strix varia*

My experience with Barred Owls begins in Cedar Rapids since I had never before lived in or near Barred Owl habitats. Here I have seen them often, even within the city and frequently during the day time.

Our home, across the street from Daniel's Park, connects somewhat with the woods in and around Shaver Park, which in turn is adjacent to the woods on either side of the Cedar River. Because of this indirect connection, Barred Owls visit Daniel's Park almost continuously, which means that it is not uncommon for them to find their way to the trees about our home.

One evening some years ago while we were in our yard, one of these owls flew in and perched on a snag of an old black oak which has since been removed. He was only about 12 feet away from us and there was still light enough so that we could observe him well. He seemed just as soberly interested in us as we were in him. As I looked at him, it occurred to me that there was something peculiarly different about this owl other than the fact that he had no horns or tufts of feathers on his head. It wasn't until after he flew away that I realized that his eyes were different. The irises were brown. All the owls I had previously observed possessed eyes with yellow irises. In this respect at least this species is different from other owls common to this area.



"ONE OF THESE OWLS FLEW IN AND PERCHED ON A SNAG OF AN OLD BLACK OAK"

After this incident I became more interested in Barred Owls in our part of town. Until then I hadn't considered it possible that they would come into the city except accidentally. But I learned shortly that their appearance within the city was rather common. Other people had observed them regularly.

Whether I became more "Barred Owl conscious" thereafter or whether Barred Owls became more regular visitors in the park across the street, I am unable to say. But I know that from then on I saw them in the park quite often and heard them even more often. I have never been able to determine definitely whether the owls nest in the park. I think that rather impossible as there seem to be no tree cavities in which they might nest. During the incubation period, which may begin in early March, Daniel's Park is very quiet as far as the owls are concerned. I believe that they nest in the Shaver Park area or even farther away, and later bring their family to Daniel's Park when the young are able to leave the nest.

There is no question as to when the new family arrives. They come announced. There is much hooting and there is a great to-do over the event by the entire family — a veritable vocal chorus. The affair really has to be talked over, it seems, in the best and most thorough Barred Owl language. I know, of course, that Barred Owls have no ultra-modern ideas about bringing up children, else I might think that the parents were attempting to reason emphatically with their young with as little success as human parents have. The parents are indeed very solicitous of their young and are very anxious that they get the proper attention. Should I visit the family while they are in the park, as often happens, there is still more noise and excitement. The parents become concerned about the safety of their young, and by vocal effort and threatening sallies try to drive the intruder away. However, not all the noise is due to concern and excitement. It seems at other times to be due to pure companionship. During the early weeks that the family is together the members seem to be unusually companionable and consequently garrulous. Later this garrulousness subsides and the owls get back to a more normal Barred Owl existence.

During my residence in a Barred Owl environment, I have become interested in distinguishing their hooting call from that of the Great Horned Owl. It was rather difficult at first, but having listened to the Barred Owl many times, I can readily recognize one from the other even though I haven't often had the opportunity to hear the Great Horned Owl.

In the first place, the call of the Barred Owl is in a higher pitch than that of the Great Horned Owl. I found it difficult at first to determine whether the pitch of a particular call was higher or lower when there was no means of comparison, but in time I succeeded. In the second place, the number of hoots or syllables in the Barred Owl's call is nearly always four, while that of the Great Horned Owl is commonly five. With the Barred Owl the four hoots are repeated, one group of four following immediately after the first four. Thus "Hooo, hooo, hoo, hooo — hooo, hooo, hoo, hoooo" illustrates the call fairly well. The ever-repeated question, "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-o-o?" gives the tempo and length of syllables better than any other English rendition I know of. The hooting of the Barred Owl is more spirited than that of the Great Horned Owl, whose lower-toned, five syllables are uttered more slowly and deliberately with an overtone of mournfulness.

The foregoing refers only to the usual and more common call of each owl. Of course, both have variations to their usual vocal offering, and the Barred Owl has a repertoire of calls and utterances that are beyond my ability to describe.

Barred Owls have been fairly common about our home in recent years. I have heard them when they seemed so close that I imagined they were

peering over my shoulder as I worked in my studio. Their presence in this area should be particularly noteworthy, I feel. In selecting a book from my shelf at random — a recent publication by a reputable ornithologist — I find this about the habitat of Barred Owls: "The favorite haunts of the Barred Owl are dense woods — not necessarily of high growth, such as the Great Horned Owl prefers, but with plenty of thick shrubbery and heavy foliage." My home area does not meet those requirements, yet after several years of observation I have come to the conclusion that the Barred Owl is more numerous than any other owl, and in a habitat that it should find rather unfavorable.

Whatever conclusion may be derived from the preceding, I hope that we may never be without our interesting friends, the Barred Owls, who visit us so frequently and hoot so alluringly.



THE WAY FRED KENT STUDIES 'EM

This is a live Barred Owl that Tom Kent got out of a chimney in Iowa City. He took some pictures of it before he released it.

## COMPILING THE STATE BIRD LIST: SOME PROBLEMS

By THOMAS J. FEENEY

1430 CLAY ST.  
DAVENPORT, IOWA

At the Newton meeting in September, Iowa Ornithologists' Union members went on record as favoring the continuance of work toward a new State list. At that time, this writer would rather have seen the Union devote its efforts to a work like the recent "Where to Find Birds in Minnesota." Since then Dr. Pettingill's "Guide to Bird Finding" has appeared for the states east of the Mississippi, and the one for the west is promised soon. Perhaps that answers our need, though it is obvious that Pettingill's work cannot be very exhaustive for an individual state.

Granted that the Union prefers to proceed with a new state list, there was so much emphasis placed on two difficulties of gathering material and of editing that it is apparent the new list is just as far away today as it was at the Davenport convention in 1950, when the same two difficulties were

thrown in the way of the committee entrusted with studying the matter. The difficulties raised are: 1) the lack of clearly defined terms to denote relative abundance of birds—e. g., common, tolerably common, abundant, etc.; 2) the determining of geographical areas to be treated.

The two difficulties become one and evaporate if we consider realistically what a modern state list might well be. There is no need of a state work which is merely a compilation of local lists. Nor need a state list pretend to be a census of the birds of the state. It should give a composite picture of the bird life of the state but not attempt to assure one that there will be a Prairie Marsh Wren in Johnson's lower pasture 3 miles east of Rose Hill year after year.

Rather than worry over terms of relative abundance for most species, it would seem more important merely to state whether a certain bird is regular or irregular as a migrant or as a breeder. In this regard the new Nevada list just published might well be studied (*Condor*, Vol. 53, No. 5, Sept.-Oct., 1951; pp. 228 ff.) For example, here are two of its entries: "Bobolink. Transient; possibly present in summer at a few places in northern Nevada.—Western Meadowlark. Resident; mostly in the lower valleys, more common in summer than in winter." Admirable in this one respect, the Nevada list insists, however, on collected specimens and makes great fuss over subspecies. If imitated in this latter regard, it would insure us of no new Iowa list for another 50 years while we argued over the problems of subspecies.

Certain birds will raise questions. But these cases should be delineated at the beginning and study commenced on them. Ones that occur readily to mind are the ranges of the two Meadowlarks, the occurrence of Mockingbirds, Turkey Vultures, Ruffed Grouse, Duck Hawks, perhaps some of the gulls. But for a great number of species it can be taken for granted from experience that they occur across the state where their habitat exists.

In the course of the discussion at Newton, Mr. Ayres suggested that only actual numbers of birds should be considered. At the moment this seemed a sound suggestion. Let the work be scientific. Sober reflection makes one wonder how some of these numbers would be obtained and what earthly purpose they might serve. Who will count the Red-winged Blackbirds of the state, and what might the number prove that any seasoned bird-watcher doesn't already know? In the 1949-1950 winter, 12 Snow Buntings remained several weeks on one wing-dam in the Mississippi River at Davenport. Had the number been 200 or only three, what difference would it have made in arriving at the regularity of occurrence of this species?

On the matter of geographical areas, the members assembled at Newton seemed dissatisfied with the six areas previously proposed. Someone suggested that we should have representation of all 99 counties. A check of the last membership list published (Dec. 1949) reveals that we have no members in about one-half of the counties, and in about another fifth of them there is only one member (and that member may not be an active field observer!). Even were it possible to check all counties, a list of perhaps 300 birds with the status for each county given would be a very unattractive book to attempt to read, let alone edit.

Although a state list must be a cooperative venture to some extent, it cannot be entirely so. There must be one writer-editor. If something is to be done toward a state list, it might be well by the time of the Cedar Rapids convention next spring to have a candidate for that post. It should be someone who has the time, ambition and interest, as well as the capability both as to ornithology and English composition. Let him begin the work. Grant him an allowance for postage and stationery. As he collects data, his policies will crystalize in his mind and he can submit them to the membership for approval, or better, to a qualified committee.

Finally, as an experiment in attacking a single problem, the writer would like to undertake a study of the ranges and comparative status of the two Meadowlarks in the state. It will be a measure of the cooperation that might be expected of the members and of the possible thoroughness of our coverage of the state. A report will be submitted to "Iowa Bird Life." Members are therefore requested kindly to send him data on their own areas or other sections of the state with which they are sufficiently familiar. If past records are not available, members are asked to keep this project in mind this spring when singing males make data easy and certain. The following indications will be helpful: Indicate geographic localities as specifically as possible. Do both species occur? If not, which? If both, which predominates? In what proportion? Are there sections of the area where one gives place to the other? What seems to be the terrain preferred by each (hilly, flat; wet, dry; etc.)?

## THE KALSOW PRAIRIE, OUR NEW STATE RESERVE

By WILLIAM YOUNG WORTH

SIoux CITY, IOWA

About two years ago the State of Iowa purchased the Kalsow Prairie, an area of 160 acres near Palmer, Pocahontas County, for a prairie preserve. The writer decided to take another look at the tract to see it in the fall before the first killing frosts seared the landscape, and drove over from Sioux City on September 18, 1951. The day was fine and enroute we stopped at the State Park on North Twin Lake, near Manson, and enjoyed our lunch on the quiet lake shore. Over a good gravel road from Manson we drove north to the easily-found Prairie Preserve. The tract is unmarked, which surprised us, as it should be well marked with game refuge signs and state park signs. Special signs warning against fire should be placed on the area. Fire would ruin the value of the prairie and probably leave it worthless for some time.

To anyone interested in botany, the Preserve is a look into the past, as it shows the Iowa prairies as they were before settlement. The tract was one big flower bed of fall wild flowers. Gentians, goldenrod, several kinds of asters and many others made the prairie a beauty spot. Many different kinds of native grasses were seen, but since we aren't botanists, we didn't know their names.

The summer birds had mostly left the safety of the dense prairie growth, but we were delighted to find a few Short-billed Marsh Wrens in the southeast corner of the area, which is dotted with low swales. We also saw one Long-billed Marsh Wren and a few marsh-loving sparrows, which ducked into the heavy grass so quickly that we couldn't decide what they were. A 1951 nest of the Short-billed Marsh Wren was found and in it the punctured white egg shell of this species. A June trip to this area should reveal some interesting bird life and is a "must" on our list for some future time.

Several species of hawks were seen in the area. Marsh, Red-tailed and Sparrow Hawks were not uncommon. The prize record, however, was one of those really rare melanistic Broad-winged Hawks, which in the early days created quite a stir in bird work, when it was called a new species by some and named the Iowa Broad-winged Hawk. It was later decided that the bird was a color phase of the regular Broad-winged Hawk and had no official standing. Nevertheless, the bird is still rare and not many are found in museum collections. The bird was a dark chocolate-brown in its entirety and a most willing poser. It sat on a fencepost and as long as we stayed in the car it sat looking at us and we had no trouble deciding what it was when we determined its small size as compared with other species of melanistic hawks.



To all you botanists and students of bird life, I recommend a spring or fall trip to this bit of wild Iowa prairie, which still remains just as many of your grandparents knew it. You will enjoy the lovely wild flowers and see birds of the prairie, as they used to live in the days of the Iowa pioneers. If you are a true conservationist and a lover of nature, you will revel in the joy of wandering over the tract for several hours, as I did. If you are not a conservationist, you will give it one look as a sea of wild grass and nodding wild flowers and drive on, probably thinking what a bare spot it is with not even a tree on it.

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### GENERAL NOTES

**Ice Suffocates Horned Lark.**—On March 18, 1951, the writer witnessed the unusual death of a Horned Lark. The weather following a heavy fall of snow was clear, windy and extremely cold. A flock of about 30 Horned Larks were observed feeding on the windswept shoulder of U. S. Highway 30 west of Ames, Iowa. Suddenly one bird began to act queerly, struggled to remain erect and then was blown about by the wind. Investigation showed that ice had formed about the bill and eyes and it had evidently suffocated. Detailed examination did not disclose any injury that could contribute to the bird's death.—ROBERT E. DREIS, Wapello, Iowa.

**Catbirds Battle Snake.**—Noon lunch on June 25, 1951, was enlivened for Robert Cleary and me by watching an encounter between a Catbird and a blue racer. We were eating in the truck at Bailey's Ford on the Maquoketa River, south of Manchester, when we noticed, about 30 feet in front of us, a Catbird that was acting strangely. It was circling something in the high grass. It hopped excitedly about, and with wings ruffled and tail spread, it would strike at an object on the ground. Soon a blue racer, about 3 feet long, rose up and struck at the Catbird, while the latter continued to carry on the battle. Soon the reptile struck again, with no apparent effect, and then crawled away. As it did so, the Catbird began a savage attack, darting at the snake and hitting it with as much force as it possessed. When the snake disappeared in a small gooseberry bush, the Catbird's mate joined in the tirade. The belligerent attitude of the Catbirds suggested a nest and young near by, but these we did not see.—FRED J. PIERCE, Winthrop, Iowa.

**Connecticut Warbler at Sioux City.**—I feel that any record of the Connecticut Warbler from western Iowa is worthy of publication, and am therefore listing my only Iowa record. On September 2, 1951, I heard a sharp warbler call from the fern bed near our back door. I opened the door and the bird flushed to a nearby tree. I grabbed my old faithful glasses and decided I had a Connecticut Warbler in my own yard. This male bird fed in the rock garden, around our little lily pool, and in the fern bed. Whenever disturbed he dived into the safety of the thick mulberry hedge. We observed this bird several times on above date and were greatly pleased to find it still around on September 3, when we had several more good looks at it.

The only other record that I have of this species in the upper Missouri River valley is a specimen, a male, taken near Valentine, Cherry County, Nebraska, nearly 20 years ago. This specimen was taken on the banks of the Niobrara River, the same brawling river down which the late Dr. Myron Swenk made one of his historic float collecting trips. From this trip came several important additions to Nebraska ornithology.—WM. YOUNGWORTH, Sioux City, Iowa.

**American Egret in Northwest Iowa.**—On our way to the annual meeting, May 12, 1951, we saw a lone Egret 7 miles south of Algona. Speaking of it later to Dr. Hendrickson, he reported his group as also seeing it.—MR. AND MRS. M. L. JONES, Boone, Iowa.

**Spring Notes for 1951 from the Sioux City Region.**—Except for a fair flight of geese, a good flight of ducks and the presence of goodly numbers of various sparrows, the spring migration was an extreme disappointment. The late, cold spring with nearly 6 inches of excess rainfall made most migrants late in arriving; others were already late getting to their nesting grounds and they didn't tarry long. With thousands of acres of rich farm land under water, the shore birds deserted their usual more or less defined haunts and were so scattered that we didn't see any. The warblers were nearly absent. If we had not had some numbers of Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Myrtle and Yellow Warblers and a few Oven-birds and Northern Water Thrushes, the Warbler wave would have been a complete loss.

The presence of a Winter Wren in our back yard during the entire day of April 24 was a pleasant surprise. Another good record was made by Bill Felton, Jr., and the writer when we found a Carolina Wren happily singing in the city dump on the Missouri River in downtown Sioux City on May 3. The late cool, wet spring was conducive to pastures. A wonderful growth was to be noted in northwest Iowa. This seemed to hold certain species and caused them to summer in places where they haven't been for years. On June 15 two species, the Bobolink and the Upland Plover, were found in several spots in the area around Peterson and Sioux Rapids, where I haven't seen them for many years.—WM. YOUNGWORTH, Sioux City, Iowa.

**Notes from Buchanan County.**—Several hunting trips in the fall of 1951 made some pleasant experiences and worthwhile bird records for me without the use of the gun.

I spent some time with Robert Cleary in a duck blind which had been constructed in the middle of the Independence mill-pond, a backwater of the Wapsipinicon River covering about 160 acres at this point. The blind was large enough to conceal our boat, and we would row out to the blind for an occasional hour of observation.

Along with the early flight of ducks, Double-crested Cormorants were present at the mill-pond as early as October 15. A Loon was seen from the blind on October 23, and late that afternoon we had the thrill of watching two Whistling Swans — the first time Cleary or I had ever seen the species. We watched them swimming on the pond for a time, and a little later they took to the air and circled our sector of the river. We admired their large size and slow, graceful flight.

My son, Paul, was running his two beagles a half-mile northeast of Winthrop on the morning of November 4, when he discovered a Long-eared Owl in a willow thicket. He returned to town, picked me up, and together we went back and observed the owl at close range for several minutes. This was at the same place where some hunter had shot a Long-ear just a year before and hung its body on a fence. I had never seen the bird here and presumed that the one killed might be the only one in the neighborhood — so I was especially glad to see the live bird in the same area.

My wife and I were going on a pheasant hunting trip at noon on November 11. As we approached the Buffalo Creek bridge northeast of Winthrop, we saw a large bird perched in a tree beside the road. It flew as we got opposite it, and we saw that it was a fine, adult Bald Eagle. We had an excellent view of its white wings and tail and immense wing spread as it took to the air and flapped leisurely to the southwest.—FRED J. PIERCE, Winthrop, Iowa.

**The Nashville Warbler as a Fall Migrant.**—Of the many warblers that we can see in western Iowa in the springtime, only a few can be counted on to be seen in the fall. The main warbler flight in the fall seems to shift east of this area and the fall night flights seem to be hurried for most species. Therefore, in the fall we can depend on observing only a few, such as the Myrtle, Orange-crowned and Nashville Warblers, and some years the Palm Warbler. Of course, there are occasional fall records of a few other species.

In going over our personal records of nearly 30 years, we discovered that we had 14 spring records for the Nashville spread through 8 years, and 15 fall records through seven years of observing. However, we found that in only four of the years did we record this warbler in both spring and fall. It is evident, then, that the Nashville Warbler is not a common migrant, either spring or fall in the upper Missouri River valley, but will be seen occasionally by careful watching. The earliest fall arrival date was August 27, 1949, and the latest date recorded was October 7, 1951.—WM. YOUNG-WORTH, Sioux City, Iowa.

Dr. P. P. Laude, 302 West Park Road, Iowa City, is chairman of the program committee for our spring convention at Cedar Rapids. A number of good papers are needed to complete the program. Those who can present papers are asked to contact Dr. Laude during the next month or so.

#### NECROLOGY

**Harriet Chapman Battell**, a charter member of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, was born on December 11, 1870, at Plattsmouth, Nebraska, the daughter of Judge Samuel Chapman and Sarah Putman Chapman. She was educated in the Plattsmouth schools and was graduated from Parsons College in 1892. She taught in the schools of Salt Lake City, Utah, until her marriage to Frederick L. Battell in 1899. After two years in Chicago, and two years in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, they moved to Mediapolis, Iowa, where they lived until 1917, when they came to Ames.

For a number of years she held a position in the English department of Iowa State College.

In 1949, she left Ames to spend the winter with her daughter, Mrs. Mary Quam, in Paoli, Pennsylvania. While there illness struck and she was never able to return to Ames. She died on October 24, 1951. Burial was at the Great Valley Presbyterian Church in the Great Valley near Paoli. All of her children, a daughter and five sons, survive her. Her husband passed away on October 26, 1945.

In Ames, Mrs. Battell was active in the Iowa State College Faculty Women's Club, particularly in the Nature Division. She was always interested in natural history and maintained her home in Ames as a small bird sanctuary. In the course of nearly 30 years of bird-banding, several thousands of birds were handled at the sanctuary. The



MRS. BATTELL

traps, in addition to year-round, well-filled feeding trays, enabled her to meet many stragglers as well as many common birds. It was Mrs. Battell's custom to telephone to other bird enthusiasts when an unusual visitor was welcomed to the sanctuary. Many of us recall the pleasure of seeing the strangers, such as the family of Evening Grosbeaks that spent several days at her home one November.

Children of the neighborhood brought lost young birds to her and were advised concerning their feeding and care; also crippled birds were brought in to be fitted with splints. To the children and also their parents, Mrs. Battell was an authority on birds and nature, and she frequently backed up her statements with enjoyable readings from her extensive library. She conducted a Christmas bird census more than 20 years with the assistance of her children and her friends.

Mrs. Battell carried on a very wide correspondence; she had many, many friends and she kept in touch with them to the end of her life.—MRS. GEORGE O. HENDRICKSON.

**Dr. T. L. Chadbourne**, member of Iowa Ornithologists' Union since 1938, died at his home at Vinton, October 17, 1951. He was born at Vinton on January 30, 1870, a son of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander S. Chadbourne. He was a graduate of the University of Michigan, receiving BS and MD degrees, and was assistant in the medical department there three years; he did hospital work at Vienna, Austria, during the summer of 1895, and a year later did research work at Berlin, Germany; he practiced his profession at Columbus, Ohio, for a year, then for five years was assistant physician at the Ohio Hospital for Epileptics; after taking post graduate work in New York City, he returned to Vinton in 1904 and began medical practice. On September 25, 1907, he was married to Miss Virginia Knox of Vinton. The couple had an adopted daughter, Mrs. John Ehlers of Reinbeck. Although Dr. Chadbourne did no writing on birds nor published any of his observations, which extended over many years, he was keenly interested in the nature world.

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#### RECENT BIRD BOOKS

**LIFE HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN WILD FOWL**, by Arthur Cleveland Bent. Reprint edition (Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1951; 2 vols.; cloth, 8vo, vol. 1, pp. i-ix+1-244, with 46 plates; vol. 2, pp. i-x+1-316, with 60 plates; price, \$8 the set).

The contents of the two Bent's volumes on Wild Fowl are too well known to serious bird students to warrant a description here. They were first published as *Bulletins* 126 and 130, by the United States National Museum, in 1923 and 1925, respectively, and at once became our best reference work on the ducks, geese and swans. Their usefulness during the last quarter century was impaired somewhat by the small editions in which they were published. There weren't enough to go around, and those few copies that appeared on the book market soon commanded very high prices, which kept many people from owning or using the books.

This scarcity situation has now been taken care of by Dover Publications, who have brought out a reprint of the book in two handsome volumes — cloth-bound, and an exact, photographic reproduction of the original type. The halftone plates, evidently also produced by photographing the original pages, fall far short of the originals, however, and in many cases are very disappointing.

The new edition of the Wild Fowl volumes will make the work available to many who have had to get along without it. These people will be grateful to Dover for supplying it.—F. J. P.

**THIS FASCINATING ANIMAL WORLD**, by Alan Devoe (McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1951; cloth, 12mo, pp. i-x+1-303, with numerous text drawings; price, \$3.75).

This is a nature book with a different approach. It is arranged in the form of questions and answers. The publisher says there are a thousand and one questions; the author agrees that there are about that many.

The author, who is a well-known naturalist and nature writer, tells us that when he was a boy his mind was filled with questions about things in the world of nature, most of them serious questions which any wide-awake boy would be likely to ask. He found the answers to some of his questions by laborious searching through ponderous volumes in the library. But the answers to many others he did not find — not until he reached manhood and had conducted studies along the line of natural history research.

His book is designed to answer many of these questions for young people. The questions have been expertly selected, and the answers are written in the highly interesting and readable style that has made Mr. Devoe's work eagerly read by thousands. Reading the book in its entirety will provide a good course in natural history, for it covers in a progressive way the important aspects of the animal world. It should arouse the interest of all readers.

The questions are grouped into chapters under these heads: Animals in General, Mammals, Birds, Insects, Snakes, Fish, Animal Variety. In the chapter on Birds we find careful answers to such questions as these: Do all birds have feathers? Can any bird fly backward? Do all birds lay eggs? Do all birds build nests? Are all birds' eggs hatched by brooding? How much do birds eat? How fast can birds fly? Do any birds have teeth? Do birds have the same temperature as we do? Do birds ever hibernate? Why do birds sing? How do sea birds manage to get fresh water to drink? Can birds count?

An index makes all the material in this very useful book readily available.—F. J. P.

### INCREASE OF DUES — A VITAL MATTER

Assuming that the annual meeting in the spring will ratify the action of the fall meeting in regard to the dues, beginning with 1952, regular membership dues will be \$2 a year. We hope that every member will accept this increase without complaint, for it is absolutely necessary if we are to continue to print "Iowa Bird Life" in anything like its former size and style.

Inflated prices have affected the printing industry as well as most other businesses, and we are faced with the prospect of increasing our dues or cutting down the size of our magazine. Most members agree that the magazine is the vital link that holds the organization together, besides furnishing a repository for important Iowa bird records that would not otherwise be published and would be lost.

Our September issue, only 12 pages, cost us as much as a 20-page issue a few years ago, and costs continue to rise as the months pass.

Although this may not be a question of survival as an organization, it is certainly a serious situation that requires the cooperation of every member who is seriously interested in our welfare. The going will be rough and it will take a lot of hard work.

If our income sags below the point where we can continue a magazine of fair size, interest in our organization and its work will also drop. Let us meet this challenge in 1952 with a determination to increase the size of our membership and make our income more adequate. We must meet this threat of inflation, which could spell our demise as a useful organization.